THE WOMAN OF THE WINDMILL.

A Romantic and Tragic Incident in the War of La Vendee.

[From the Figaro.]

It was a pretty little windmill, with its big round tower capped by a weather vane, its long arms or blades which rattled in the west wind like the sails of a boat in stays, and its little round windows looking over the hills of Anjou like the telescopes of an astronomer—such was the windmill of Bernardeau; and when it was working all the windmills around the neighborhood looked like white sea gulls pursued by a bird of prey. It was situated on the slope of the Guigne at the end of a little crooked pathway hardly wide enough for the mill donkey, and in which one might search in vain for traces of human footprints, because it was so dark under its vault of shrubbery, so muddy and rugged that the woman of the mill always took to the vines when on her way to Ancenis on foot.

And a handsome woman, too, was this lady of the mill. She was twenty-five years old, with a well-rounded form, a little hand, flashing dark eyes, lips as red as wild cherries and a well-turned leg. She was smart in her attire, and there was little in her appearance to reveal the fact that she was a widow. When she came into the village mounted upon the donkey that carried her bags of flour, all the young fellows came out to admire her fine figure and the beautiful limbs which appeared below her short skirt.

Even the donkey himself seemed proud of his mistress. He traveled along at an easy gait, tossing his head and cocking his ears, as if to say to everybody, "Here she is; you have only to look at her; this is la Meuniere of Bernardeau. There isn't another woman like her in all the country!" And that was the truth. But she was the subject of a great deal of gossip. How the tongues did wag on her account! It was said that since the death of her husband, a poor goose of a fellow who had taken her without a cent from a farm and left her all his property, she frequently tossed her cap over the blades of her windmill. Whether this was true or not, the blades certainly never told; but one thing is certain, and that is that she did hang up her cap there publicly on one occasion, and it cost her her life. Here is her story:

The first thing the Vendeens did when they rose in revolt against the republic was to make use of the windmills. Nothing could be better suited for signalling or more troublesome for the enemy. Where the Blues could only see white wings turning round in a melancholy fashion, the Chouans possessed a perfect telegraphic system, which told them of the movements of the republican army.

The windmill of Bernardeau was one of the principal vedettes on the Loire. Three days before the attack upon Nantes, Cathelineau came to the mill of Bernardeau and asked for shelter. It was the 22d of June, 1793. Bonchamp was at Ancenis since the 17th awaiting the main body of the army. The weather was magnificent, and the Vendeens camped in the open air. When Cathelineau at the end of a little road found himself face to face with the beautiful woman of the mill, he asked her if she was a royalist.

"One might easily become a royalist to serve under so handsome an officer as you," said she.

"Good enough! Then let me have shelter here to-night."

The meuniere cheerfully welcomed him and Cathelineau slept that night in the mill. The next morning when he was leaving she sent to him from the threshold of the mill a perfect volley of kisses, after which she went up to the highest little window in the mill and waved her little white handkerchief.

Eight days afterward Cathelineau, mortally wounded, was coming from Ancenis in a carriage, and as he passed by the mill he cast a long and sad look at it. According to the order, its blades were arranged so as to announce the approach of the soldiers of Canclaux.

From the 17th of October to the 17th of December, during the sixty days which separated the two retreats of the Vendeen army on the Loire, the mill of Bernardeau continued its signals of intelligence with those of la Vendee. But the 17th of December was its last day.

Harassed by the Mayencais, that crushed them at the battle of Mans, the Vendeens reached Ancenis and endeavored to cross the Loire; but for want of sufficient rafts a considerable number of them were obliged to abandon the effort and to advance through the country, in the hope of escaping the enemy.

At sight of this old mill, which they immediately recognized as an ally, about twenty men took refuge in it just at the moment when Westermann came to the heights of Bel Air.

Suddenly a puff of blue smoke rolled from one of the upper windows of the mill. The meuniere herself commenced the fight.

"Good shot!" she said; "there is one less now."

Westermann ordered a company of hussars to surround the old mill. He was in too great a hurry to finish with La Rochejacquelin to bother himself with windmills. The hussars had hardly arrived at the mill before his flying artillery began to cannonade the few rafts of the Chouans, who were endeavoring to cross the Loire. The officer who was in command of the company summoned the occupants of the mill to surrender.

The meuniere opened a little window, fastened her lace cap on the point of one of the blades, and shouted out: "Come and get it, you ill-shaped puppy!"

A volley from the hussars was the only answer to those insolent words. The window panes were broken to fragments. The Vendeens inside returned the fire and dropped five of the horsemen. The company then dismounted and rushed against the door of the mill, which they broke with the butts of their guns.

"Surrender, you scoundrels, or in a few moments you'll all be dead!" shouted the officer.

"You are the scoundrels!" yelled the woman of the mill. "Let me see if you are able to get my cap."

The hussars entered the lower story, but the ladder was removed by the Vendeens who now fired upon them from the story above, and made terrible ravages in their ranks.

The woman of the mill busied herself with the work of loading the guns, a task which she performed with astonishing rapidity. The Chouans, sheltered behind the flour sacks, cared little for the fire of the Blues.

"Take good aim!" cried la menuiere; "don't let a single one escape."

The officer, seeing his men fall all around him, ordered them to come out and take the place by storm, scaling the arms of the mill. It was a magnificent assault. Twenty hussars clambered up the blades. With their carbines thrown across their backs they clambered up like sailors to the story above, and from there fell either killed or wounded under the balls or the bayonet thrusts of the Vendeens. One brigadier managed to get up to the roof by making a rampart of the bodies of his comrades, who held on to the arms like drowning men to planks.

"We are all right, my friends!" cried he; "guard well the entrance of the mill!" After planting the colors of the company on the weather vane he bored a hole in the roof to admit the barrel of his gun. Three times he fired and mortally wounded three men. This threw the besieged into a panic; resistance was becoming impossible, and the Vendeens were already raising the butts of their guns in the air, when la meuniere pushed down the ladder and cut off their retreat. "Now die like men!" she shouted. Then there commenced a perfect massacre. Attacked above and below, the Vendeens fought like imprisoned lions. When the ammunition was exhausted they threw down the sacks of corn and flour, and, clubbing their muskets, jumped down among the Blues, who received them on the points of their bayonets. It was a horrible spectacle.

"Where is la meuniere?" shouted the hussars.

"Here she is, citizens," said she, as she let herself slip along the shaft of the mill. "I have given to you no quarter, and I don't want any mercy from fellows like you!"

"All right," said the officer, "We'll settle your account in short order. Place yourself against that wall."

There was something singularly graceful and proud in her bearing and a glance of withering contempt in her eye as she advanced toward the wall. Her splendid black hair was now floating in disorder upon her shoulders. She gathered it modestly around her breast, so as to hide her torn corsets. Then she stood against the wall.

"Now fire and be damned!" said she.

This piece of feminine boldness made the officer hesitate. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-five."

"Your name?"

"I am la meuniere du Bernardeau."

"Do you want to live?"

"No, I'd rather die than receive mercy from you."

"Come now, simply shout 'Long live the republic,' and I'll let you go free."

"Long live the king!" she cried in a vibrating voice.

A moment afterwards there was the rolling sound of a volley. That was the last of the meuniere of Bernardeau.

"She was a plucky piece of flesh, all the same," said the soldiers.

Westermann's hussars lost in that attack twenty-two men and eight wounded.

Since then the mill has remained abandoned as if it were cursed. Open to all the winds of heaven, without a roof, without arms, it stands. Occasionally a tramp passing through the country takes shelter there and sleeps with the swallows and the bats. Following its well-known habit, the ivy, which seems to be in love with ruins, gradually entwined itself around it, and from a distance the uncrowned tower has the aspect of a ruined fortress.

How many times have I wandered through that section of the country seeking for details of the dramatic scene which I have endeavored to picture; but la meuniere of Bernardeau had such a bad reputation in that country that her heroic death was not sufficient to cover over, at least in the minds of the peasantry, the faults which she had or which were attributed to her.

"There is one sign that should be placed over every letter-box in the city." "What is that?" "'Post no bills.'"—Ram's Horn.

A Fire-Fly Festival.

[Sen Katayama in Harper's Magazine.]

But there is one season in summer when the h'yakusho comes into closer touch with nature in her robes of night. It is when the hotaru, the fire-flies, come. Then as evening falls you can see their flashing lanterns along the brooks and the moist lowlands; and you can watch the children in their delight catching those tiny fragments of an unknown star as they rest upon the rushes, and then imprisoning them in little cages of gauzy transparent silk. In a little earth at the bottom of the cage they planted a millet seed, and it has grown to a sprout of an inch or so, and here is a tiny basin of water beside it. In such a cage the fire-fly will be the children's delight for several days.

Of an evening some one will make up a party of the villagers and go to a beautiful river or lake on a hotaru-gari (a fire-fly excursion). They will take a lunch and spend the evening there, seeing nature at her best, and bringing back a store of joy. Their lunch they take to the azumaya, a little open rustic house with a floor of bamboo, with a railing around it, and with a quaint thatched roof supported on four posts; and it always overlooks some pretty water scene. There they spread their dainties—sake (rice wine), takenoko (bamboo shoots cooked with a rich sauce), rice cakes, pickles of many sorts, sweetmeats, and a host of good things that taste can suggest and skill produce. When they have finished their feasting they stroll in groups to the railing and watch the flashing of the fire-flies and their multiplied reflections on the water below. The most bashful girl may converse without fear of exposing her blush; for the fire-fly gives only light enough to enable one to see another's outline—or perhaps to catch a smile. As the evening advances a moon that is just beginning to wane comes tardily up over the eastern mountains, and sends down her soft light through the slight haze upon scenes that are perfect in their beauty as they creep out of the shadows of the mountains. Through the leaves the light steals down, and soon below there is a crystal mirror afloat upon the water. With the rising of the moon everything is changed. The attention is raised from the faint flashing of the hotaru to the scenes that the moon reveals. In the sky are a few strokes of wandering cloud that seem to have strayed from to-day's thunder storm. Past the beautiful clusters of cloud flies a solitary cuckoo, sending down his sweet and sorrowful voice, sending through the listeners a thrill of longing. But the rising of the moon has told the company that it is time to go home. Two by two, hand in hand, they go—leisurely along the river bank, under the bamboos whispering in the rising night wind.

No Such Foot in Stock.

[From the Boston Advertiser.]

A lady, well dressed, and apparently intelligent, entered a plaster caster's shop on Province Court the other day and inquired earnestly:

"You make casts, don't you? Have you a cast of Trilby's foot?"

The good-looking young man in attendance blushed and stammered out that he had an impression that Trilby was a myth.

"Well," said the would-be customer, "I was told that you would have it, if anybody; but if you haven't it I must look elsewhere." And she glared at the presumptuous young man and flounced out.

Almost an Accident.

"Speaking of narrow escapes," observed Mr. Chugwater, reaching for his second cup of coffee, "did I tell you I was on a train the other day that came within three feet of being run into by another train going at full speed?"

"For mercy's sake, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Chugwater. "How did it happen?"

"The train that came so near running into ours," he rejoined, buttering a biscuit, "was on the other track, and going the other way."

It was several minutes before Mrs. Chugwater broke loose, but when she did she made up for lost time.—Chicago Tribune.